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Learning through Life

The word “educated” has a different meaning for every single person. For some, it means to go out and party, while studying every now and then. For others, it means studying so hard alone in your room all day until you feel as if your brain is going to explode. For me, being educated takes place outside the classroom. The experiences and challenges you go through outside the classroom and through life are completely different among every person as well, but in the end, it makes up who we are. Being educated means knowing what to do once you find yourself through those experiences, and what you do after using the information you learned and gained from those certain experiences. Education does not mean you have to spend so many years in school, and you are magically considered to be "educated". You become educated once you find what things are most important to you, and what you do with your life once you find what those important things are.

“Education” is not Everything

I feel way more educated about certain things in life compared to other people because of my past experiences. I did not really have an “education” my whole junior and half of senior year in high school. Instead, I spent every single day of my entire junior year and the first few months of senior year in outpatient physical therapy, and then the next 2 months in a hospital for treatment of my RSD that became progressively worse over many years. I did not have structured schooling and pretty much skipped that year and a half of school. It was a very complicated and difficult time for me because of how much school I missed the beginning of my junior and senior year. During my junior year of high school, I was put on homebound and had a teacher from each major subject come to my house. Each teacher would come for one hour, once a week, so I had a total of 5 hours of schooling each week. I tried going back to school the beginning of my senior year, but it was really hard for me to get around school without being on the floor shaking and crying. I did not like being homebound my junior year because I never got to see any of my friends, so after about a month, I started cyber school that my high school offered. Cyber school worked a lot better for me because I was able to stay in the high school

library and have my friends visit me until I moved into the rehabilitation hospital where I had no schooling. Even though I was not in school, I felt like I became way more educated than I ever would have if I did not go through all of the experiences I went through. During that time, I found out more about myself and the things that I held most important to me. But meeting, talking, and finding out the stories other people had of their past, and their current struggles, helped me receive an education most people would never have the chance to get. The most I have ever learned was all packed into those long two months spent in the rehabilitation hospital.

Holding on to Hope

If it was not for my junior and senior year of high school, I would have never come to the decision to be a childhood special education teacher. The hospital I was at was not just a random old chosen hospital. It took over a year to fight with the insurance companies, finding a hospital that treated RSD with the quickest opening for me, so I would not delay my chances of remission any longer. I finally got in to Children's Specialized Hospital, and was so surprised just to see how different the place was compared to the other hospitals I had been in and out of. It was a children's hospital so the average of all the kids in there was 8 years old. There were a few teenagers that also lived on my floor, but a majority of them were much younger than me. But, these kids had stories. Incredible stories. Just like me, a lot of these were very sick and could not walk for so many different reasons. The whole floor of us were so close, though, because of just how much we all had in common. No one else understood what it was like to have physical disabilities except for the group of us. Some of the most memorable and meaningful moments of my life were the late nights spent there. I lived right next to our game room that would close at 9 pm. Afterwards, a lot of the kids on my floor would come into my room and just talk about our personal lives and struggles, our long hours of therapy and all of our therapists, and just all the fun we would still have, despite the fact that we were all in a hospital. There were nights where I would really connect with the kids. I got to hear the incredible things they have overcome, despite how hard and painful it all was for them. Some of the most upsetting stories we shared were about the way people and society treated us because of our disabilities that came suddenly, including brain trauma caused by a car accident,

cancer, or RSD. Talking about everything helped them cope with their pain and forget about their doctor appointments, surgeries, or hours of chemo, physical, and occupational therapy sessions we all still had to go through. I gave them all advice and encouragement to them to stay strong and hold on to hope, because everything will get better with hard work and determination. If the late nights went past 1 in the morning, the nurses would eventually come into my room yell at all of us to go to bed since we all had therapy early the next morning. Although, the long talks of encouragement, hanging out and laughing was always worth being tired the next morning.

Perseverance for the Present

I still think about those special moments I had while I was sick here at Bloomsburg. My personal battle and the support I gave to other's battles still carry on today. I still keep in touch with just about every one of them and have group Skype dates. We still talk late into the night, talking and telling each other of our lives outside the hospital and what all we are able to do now since our treatments. A lot of them still struggle a great amount, so I support and talk everything through them. If they are ever having a bad day, they always know to text me to put a smile on their face. I remind them of everything they have already persevered through, and just that thought makes them feel better. The one quote I hold on to for perseverance is from Newt Gingrich: "Perseverance is the hard work you do after you get tired of doing the hard work you already did." Perseverance is a key factor in success and I always tell them to remember that. The kids still inspire me to continue my therapy every day here to prevent another relapse. There are days where I still have sit-backs, I know I have the greatest support group back at home who want me to succeed. Here in Bloomsburg, I visit and talk to some of the kids who are in the nearby hospital and encourage them to keep fighting and have hope, because things will get better if you have the determination and perseverance to change.

Focusing on the Future

The same thing is true for me now as it was one year ago: I have to focus on the future and what my education here at Bloomsburg will lead me to. After I get my degree in childhood special education, I hope to become a teacher in a rehabilitation hospital. I wish to be a child's temporary teacher while they go through long hours of therapy or treatments and miss so

much school because of it. I have seen the teachers in hospitals either come to the child in their room if the child is unable to go to the separate classroom that is on the hospital floor. If I keep up with my school work and my therapies now, I know I can become a great special education teacher because of how much I can relate to the children. I have gone through similar experiences myself, and already have experience with encouraging kids who have disabilities and not letting it take control of their lives. I imagine myself in a few years working in a child's hospital room teaching him or her. If they have had a rough day in therapy, and talk to me about it, I will tell them my story of being in the position they are in. I will tell them this story, as well as some of the rough days I had in therapy and how I got through them. I also hope to reach out to other patients who have unfortunately also been diagnosed with RSD, to tell them that it really is possible to live a "normal" life once again, despite the pain and determination to get there. Right now, I have control of my life and where I want to go in my future. I hope to use what I have done, and what I'm still doing now, to help me with my future career path in childhood special education.